

## **New Dorp Video: Smaller Learning Community Inquiry Teams**

Slide: New Dorp High School

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Video begins with Ms. Zoleo speaking.

Ms. Zoleo: My name is Dina Zoleo. I am the Assistant Principal of Social Studies and the supervisor of the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American and Legal Studies Smaller Learning Community, otherwise known as SLC.

Slide: Inquiry teams from New Dorp gather to share what they have learned in the past year about effective instruction

Video focus returns to Ms. Zoleo who continues speaking.

Ms. Zoleo: The first presentation is being presented by Minda Martinez and Jeff Benjamin. Minda Martinez is a Spanish teacher in the Gilder Lehrman SLC and Jeff Benjamin is a history teacher in the Gilder Lehrman SLC. The presentation focuses on our inquiry work which started in January and ended in June. It highlights the interventions that we have used, the assessment tests that were given, and the progress of the target students in that SLC.

Video shows teacher presenting to colleagues at the end of the school year.

Ms. Martinez: Issues in technical writing has been a recurring skills surfaced by New Dorp inquiry work. That's why our school embarked on a school-wide writing initiative this year. Over the past three years we focused on organization of ideas, organization of a paragraph, transitional words and phrases, sequencing, complex sentence structure, integrating quotes into a paragraph, listening and note taking, and usage.

After analyzing student work, we noticed that there were two areas of weakness. The first was sentence fragments, and the second was sentence expansion. This is a sample from our pre-assessment essay. If you notice the sentences are rather choppy, there is no use of transitional words or phrases, there is no use of conjunctions, and also there are fragments throughout.

Video shows a group of teachers sitting at a conference table with notes and papers in front of them. A white board showing examples of student writing is in the background. They can be seen reviewing and discussing these papers.

Narrator: To make a real difference in schools, you have to address instruction not just structure. New Dorp High School in Staten Island, New York, has made a strong effort to accomplish this. It has, to some degree, succeeded. The key for them is teacher collaboration.

Teachers work together throughout the year to study student needs, classroom work, and instructional strategies that can address the skills students need to work on. Teachers meet together three times a week in small inquiry teams. Inquiry teams define a student need and a target group of students who are challenged in this area to work with. Over the course of the year, they design instructional strategies and measure how using them affect students' abilities.

Ms. Zoleo: So the focus of this meeting today is to look at where we stand as far as the academic interventions for the target students. We've already had...

Narrator: The Inquiry team, comprised of teachers of many disciplines and grade levels, targeted the skill of combining ideas into complex sentences.

Ms. Zoleo: So was this a good strategy? What was your...

Teacher: The objective was to go to the next step to really show these students. That was the difficulty I was having with these kids. They were saying: "Well, why can't I use the sentences that are there? They are complete. They're long sentences." The one thing I had to keep responding to these students—it's a more complete thought. You don't speak this way. (Speaker gives some examples.) It's too choppy. They're complete sentences but they're choppy. I want them to be able to flow with their thought process.

Ms. Zoleo: The goal is to basically write...

Video shows teachers continuing this meeting.

Narrator: As a result of a rigorous process, teachers try new instructional strategies, termed interventions, in their classrooms. Teachers look closely at student work to diagnose the challenges students are experiencing and the growth in their skills.

Teacher: He (a student) had the idea in the content area. He does seem to have a little bit of a problem with using the correct tense, using punctuation and capitalization.

Ms. Zoleo: He was picked as a target in the first place because I remember he had a lot of fragments, using fragments all the time. He's on his way...

Narrator: The team also designs formal assessments and uses them to measure progress and discuss reasons for these results.

Teacher: As we previously discussed, four out of eight of our ninth graders scored an 80 or higher on the second assessment exam so we decided that we were not going to re-test them. However, the other four scored below an 80 so we gave them the third assessment exam. So at this point we need to look at the second and third assessment exams, and see if they made any progress and also note the point differences.

So we can fill out the chart together – the second assessment exam he scored a 60. Let's take a look at the next one and see if he made any progress – he went up to a 90. Point difference is 30 points higher on the third assessment exam. So I was wondering if

anyone could discuss why they feel that he went up so much. Were the interventions effective?

Teacher: I found the intervention effective...

Narrator: At the end of the year, each inquiry team shares its work.

Slide: Year end presentations celebrate teacher and student learning

Video shows teacher presenting to colleagues at the end of the school year.

Mr. Benjamin: Right – basically our conclusion is, as it says here that our targeted students have made improvement in sentence expansion. This skill is not shown to transfer to their individual essays or paragraphs at this time. So our great challenge, we feel in September, is to try to emphasize paragraph writing.

Slide: Between 2008 and 2009, the percentage of students accumulating enough credits to be on track to graduate jumped nine points, from 61 to 70 percent.

Video shows the teacher group once again surrounding a conference table with papers in front of them, discussing the materials presented. All teachers are participating by sharing out their individual experiences or listening to others speaking.

Narrator: New Dorp's collaborative inquiry process has led teachers to see that they can make a real difference in improving students' achievement. To date over 45 inquiry teams have gathered teachers to work together on narrowly define students needs. Each one generates effective teaching strategies that directly address the students' needs. They also contribute to the teachers' sense of efficacy, accountability, and collegiality. One inquiry at a time, New Dorp staff has found effective ways to move student achievement.

Video of teachers gathered around the conference table discussing and planning fades out.

Slide: Find out more about New Dorp High School at [slcp.ed.gov](http://slcp.ed.gov)

Slide: The Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program awards discretionary grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) to support the implementation of SLCs and activities to improve student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students.

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